

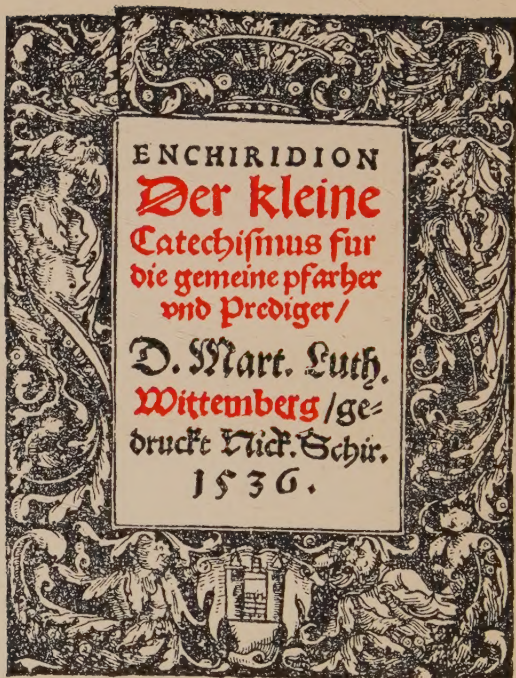
Four Hundredth
Anniversary

**Luther's
Small
Catechism**

1529-1929

BX
8070
L8
M83
1929
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Gift by
Paul J. Slawik



*Cover Design of the Edition of 1536 of
Dr. M. Luther's Small Catechism*

The Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther,
a Most Precious Gift of the Reformation of the Church

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

Four Hundredth Anniversary

OF THE PUBLICATION OF

**Luther's
Small Catechism**

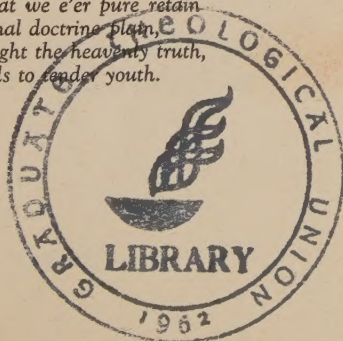
1529~1929

BY

John Theodore Mueller, Ph.D., Th.D.

PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY
CONCORDIA SEMINARY
ST. LOUIS

Lord, grant that we e'er pure retain
The Catechismal doctrine plain,
As Luther taught the heavenly truth,
In simple words to tender youth.



~~BX 8070~~
~~Mu 88~~

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Preface



FOR four hundred years Luther's Small Catechism has now scattered ineffable blessings, eternal in duration, throughout the world, not only in Lutheran circles, but also outside of them. Its great value is still being recognized by millions of men, women, and children, who by God's grace know what the great Reformation of the Church in the sixteenth century meant. Luther's Small Catechism is indeed a most precious gift to a world lost in sin; it teaches Christ, and Him crucified, in so charming and convincing a manner that multitudes have come to the Savior's throne of grace through its simple, but profound, testimony. It is a book to study, to love, and to spread, for the sake of the sublime truths which it proclaims.

Four hundred years are a long time in which to enjoy the unmer-

ited blessings of divine grace. Let us, then, be grateful, and make the year 1929 a year of sincere rejoicing and thanksgiving for the inestimable gift of our Lord: *Luther's Small Catechism*.

This little booklet has been written in order to assist in this service of joy and praise. May our Lord Jesus Christ bless it as it goes forth on its mission.

John Theodore Mueller.

St. Louis, Missouri.

1. When Luther's Small Catechism Was Written



N January 20th, 1529, Roerer, the Wittenberg proofreader, wrote to his friend Roth: "Nothing new has appeared.

I believe that the Catechism as preached by Dr. Martin for the unlettered and simple will be published for the coming Frankfort Mass. However, while writing this, I glance at the wall of my dwelling, and fixed to the wall, I behold *tables embracing in shortest and simplest form Luther's Catechism for children and the household*, and forthwith I send them to you as a sample."

This letter of proofreader Roerer is of the greatest importance in fixing the time when the first draft of Luther's Small Catechism was published. It appeared, no doubt, during the first week of 1529, not in

book form, it is true, but printed on charts or tables, and containing, as we definitely know, the Decalog, Creed, and Lord's Prayer. A second edition of the "tables" was issued on March 16th, 1529, and this contained the five chief parts, the Decalog, Creed, Lord's Prayer, Baptism, and Lord's Supper, besides some of the prayers which we have in our Catechism today.

While working on his Small Catechism, Luther, in spite of illness and an abundance of other work, completed his Large Catechism, which was published in April, 1529. Both Catechisms, the Large and the Small, were intended for all classes of people: preachers, teachers, parents, and children. The Large Catechism, in particular, was to enable the less educated pastors in the villages and in the country properly to instruct the ignorant youth, and to preach the fundamental Christian truths to adults and children. Both Catechisms, therefore, treat of the same five chief parts; both purpose

to instruct the "unlettered and simple" in the chief doctrines of God's Word; both set forth the same truths, though in a different manner. The Small Catechism is composed of questions and answers, and is an epitome of the Large. The Large Catechism is a more detailed explanation of the chief Gospel truths in the form of brief sermons. The greater is to serve the less.

The first person to issue the charts, containing Luther's Catechism in book form, was Pastor Bugenhagen, who published them as a booklet in the Low German language about April, 1529. His first Catechism, in book form, contained the five chief parts, as well as the Benedicite and the Gratias, or the prayers before and after meal.

Luther's own High German book edition of the Small Catechism came out on May 16th, 1529. The final form of his Small Catechism was the edition of 1531, which bore the following title: *Enchiridion* (handbook); the Small Catechism

for Common Pastors and Preachers. Martin Luther, Dr. XXXI.

In 1529, there appeared at Wittenberg also two Latin translations of Luther's Catechism, which prove how deeply it was appreciated, not only by simple laymen, but also by erudite scholars. From the very start, both Catechisms of Luther were diligently studied by the learned and the unlearned. The oldest proof of the practical use to which the Catechism was put, we find in the records of the convent of Nimtzschen; here on June 15th, 1529, Justus Jonas, Luther's friend, enjoined that the sisters should be instructed in the Catechism three times a week, the abbess putting the questions and the nuns memorizing and reciting the answers. Like Luther's Ninety-five Theses, the Small Catechism, which he presented to the world, spread with great rapidity throughout Europe, and was soon the most popular book of Christian instruction in evangelical Christendom.

The first complete edition of Luther's Small Catechism contained, as said before, the five chief parts, the Morning and the Evening Prayer, the Benedicite and Gratias, a form for marriage, and the Table of Duties. In the second edition in book form, which likewise appeared in 1529, Luther added several new parts, among which was an "Instruction How to Confess." In 1531, when the final form of the Catechism appeared, Luther substituted for this the excellent part, "How the Unlearned Should be Taught to Confess." This proves that Luther was anxious to offer to the people the best Catechism he could produce. In fact, numerous improvements of more or less significance were made by Luther until the year 1542, four years before his death. After his death, the part, "the Office of the Keys," was added. This was placed before Luther's "Instruction on Confession," so that the fifth chief part, Lord's Supper, now became the sixth. While the doctrines

set forth in the "Office of the Keys" were taken from the sermons of the great theologian John Brenz, they are in full agreement with what Luther himself taught on this score. Another change that was made, was the addition of the "Christian Questions," which were drawn up by Luther's friend John Lang, on the basis of Luther's sermons. However, there are some who claim that Luther himself wrote these valuable questions and answers.

Let us, then, not forget the important date: May 16th, 1529; it was at this time that Luther's Small Catechism appeared at Wittenberg in book form and under Luther's own supervision.

Vorrede Doctor



Artinus

Luther/ Allen trewen fromen
Pfarrhern vnd Predigern/ Gnade/ Barm-
hertzigkeit vnd Friede inn Ihesu
Christo/ vnserm Herrn.

Diesen Catechismon oder Chri-
stliche lere/ inn solche kleine schle-
chte einfeltige form zu stellen/ hat
mich gezwungen vnd gedrungen/
die klegliche elende not/ so ich nero-
lich erfahren habe/ da ich auch ein
Visitator war. Hilff lieber Gott/
wie manchen jamer habe ich ge-
sehen/ das der gemeine man doch
so gar nichts weis von der Chris-
tlichen lere / sonderlich auff den
Dörffern/ vnd leider viel Pfarrher
fast vngeschickt vnd vntüchtig
sind zu leren/ Vnd sollen doch alle
Aij Chris

*The Beginning of the Preface in the
Edition of 1536 of
Dr. M. Luther's Small Catechism*

2. Why Luther Wrote His Catechism



ALREADY in the Old Testament God commanded the children of Israel that they should instruct their children in the Holy Word. In Deut 6: 6-7 we read: "These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart. And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children." How well faithful parents complied with this command, we learn from 2 Tim. 3: 15-16, where we are told that Timothy "from a child" knew the Holy Scriptures. Also in the early Christian Church the children were conscientiously instructed in the chief parts of the Christian faith as the sermons of St. Chrysostom and other prominent preachers prove. However, when the papacy was established and the darkness of false doctrine, superstition, and ignorance in spiritual matters set-

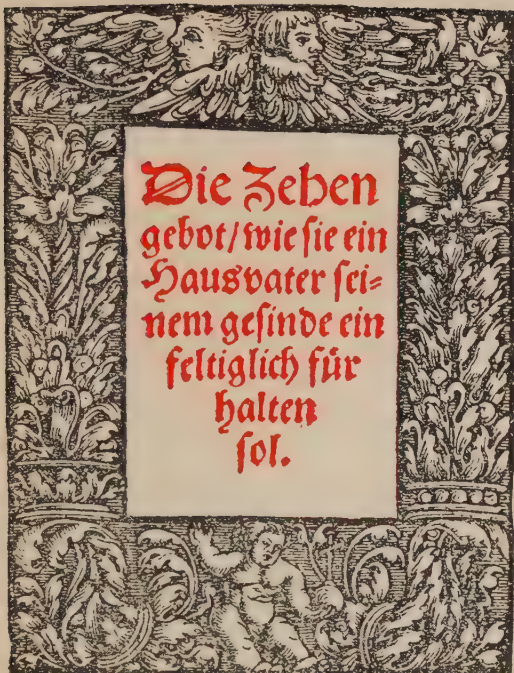
tled down upon the poor Church, the instruction of the children was shamefully neglected. It is true, prayer books for the young were written, but they were pervaded by idolatry and saint-worship combined with the most silly superstitions. The total decay of all Christian knowledge and instruction was complete when Luther was finally called by God to carry out his great work of the Reformation.

When Luther with others took part in the Saxon Church Visitation, from 1528-1529, he was horrified by the appalling ignorance of both pastors and people. He wrote to his friend Spalatin: "Conditions in the congregations everywhere are pitiable, for the peasants learn nothing, know nothing, never pray, do nothing but abuse their liberty."

It was this "miserable condition everywhere in the congregations" which moved Luther to write his Catechism; for so he testifies in the preface to the Small Catechism: "The deplorable, miserable condi-

tion which I discovered lately when I, too, was a visitor, has forced and urged me to prepare this Catechism, or Church doctrine, in this small, plain, simple form. Mercy! Good Lord! what manifold misery I beheld! The common people, especially in the villages, have no knowledge of Christian doctrine, and alas! many pastors are altogether incapable and incompetent to teach."

These words are important. Luther wrote his Catechism for a simple and practical reason; the horrible spiritual ignorance of the common people necessitated such a book of instruction. The Catechism became one of the means through which by the grace of God he carried out the Reformation of the Church. This ought to make it dear and precious to us.



Die Zehen
gebot/wie sie ein
Hausvater sei-
nem gesinde ein
feltiglich für
halten
sol.

*The Introductory Title to the Ten Command-
ments in the Edition of 1536 of Dr.
M. Luther's Small Catechism*

3. Why Luther was the Logical Man to Write the Catechism



UTHER was preeminently endowed with the necessary gifts to produce a good and serviceable Catechism. He was the man best fitted for the task, though at first he urged others to write catechisms. Some of his friends tried, but their booklets were failures. The only Catechism that was used with profit was that of the great Wuertemberg theologian, John Brenz. However, when Luther's Enchiridion or Catechism appeared, it was so superior in every way that it soon became the outstanding Catechism in the Lutheran Church. Not Luther's name and prestige, but real merit accounts for this, as we shall see anon; his book of instruction was a gem, a veritable masterpiece. What made it such?

First, Luther thoroughly prepared himself for the writing of his Catechism by preaching regularly, from 1517-1528, on the chief parts of the Christian faith. Out of these sermons and meditations his Catechism was developed; it was the ripe fruit of solid, honest, earnest work for the good of the Church.

Second, Luther was a most faithful Bible student, who lived in God's Word as no one else at his time. He was therefore fully qualified to set forth the sacred Bible truths in their truth and purity.

Third, Luther knew which Bible truths were fundamental, namely, those regarding sin, grace, prayer, and the means of grace. He declared to his people "all the counsel of God" necessary for salvation. He wanted Christians to be true believers and well-grounded and well-instructed confessors of the truth. From this viewpoint he wrote his Catechism, presenting in it not one particular doctrine, but the chief parts of the Christian faith, which

a Christian must know to be saved. Hence, Luther's Catechism was a most satisfactory book of instruction.

Fourth, Luther was a man of the people and for the people. He understood the common man, — his failings, troubles, sorrows, as also his virtues. He, the peasant's son, could therefore also write a Catechism which the common people were able to understand and appreciate.

Fifth, Luther loved children, not only his own but also those of others. Following in the footsteps of Christ, he gladly and conscientiously taught Jesus' little lambs. His Catechism was written in the glowing heat of his deep pastoral love for the youth.

Sixth, Luther was a master of languages. When He wrote his Catechism he had already practised his pen by translating the New Testament. Hence, he could write a popular Catechism, a book for the

people, in simple, concise, charming, and thrilling words full of magic beauty. Also so far as the language is concerned, Luther's Catechism is a work of art.

Seventh, Luther was a man not of the world, but living in close touch with everything that occurred in the world. He did not spend his time in a secluded cloister cell, but among people, the learned and the unlearned, the exalted and the lowly. He had a universal mind. That is the reason why his Catechism appeals to so many different classes of men. He had the common human touch.

Now we can understand why Luther's Catechism turned out to be so excellent a work. It was not by accident. Luther was the logical man to write the one great Protestant Catechism.

**Das Sacrament der
heiligen Tauffe/ Wie dassel=
bige ein Hansvater seinem gesinde
sol einfeltiglich für=
halten.**

Die Figur? Matthei XXVIII.



*A Sample of the Illustrations used in the
Edition of 1536 of
Dr. M. Luther's Small Catechism*

5. The Excellency of Luther's Catechism



THE excellency of Luther's Catechism is two-fold; it applies, first, to its form; and second, to its contents. Let us consider its excellency of form.

First, Luther's Catechism is *brief*, so that children may easily learn it by heart. Brevity is the mother of wit; it is also the first prerequisite of a good Catechism. Luther wanted the Bible truths imbedded in the hearts of the children. So he made it short.

Second, Luther's Catechism is *simple*, in fact, so simple that a child can readily grasp its meaning; yet so profound that the most learned scholar can never fathom its marvelous truths of salvation.

Third, Luther's Catechism is neither *apologetic* nor *polemic*. It neither defends the faith nor argues the faith; it simply teaches the Chris-

tian faith; yet in such a splendid way that it wins victories.

Fourth, the language of Luther's Catechism is masterful; it is the good, sound, solid tongue of the average man wonderfully adapted for translation into other languages. Luther's Catechism is today learned and recited in every important language of the world. The Esquimos have it as well as the Zulus.

Fifth, Luther's Catechism is excellently arranged. First comes the Law, then the Gospel, then Christian Prayer; then follow the two Sacraments, with an instruction on Confession. The Catechism follows the order of salvation: from sin to grace; from grace to the worship and service of Christ in the spirit of true faith.

Sixth, Luther's Catechism is rich in content; it sets forth the sublimest truths, and all of them centered in Christ's vicarious atonement.

Seventh, Luther's Catechism is *interesting*. Yes, it is! Study it in

the right way, and at the foot of the Cross, and it will hold you spell-bound.

The excellency of Luther's Catechism applies also to its *contents*. The great Reformer said of it, "The Catechism is the true Bible of the laity, in which the whole content of the Christian doctrine is comprised, which it is necessary for a Christian to know."

So likewise the Formula of Concord says, "We also confess the Small and Large Catechisms of Dr. Luther, as they are included in Luther's works, as the Bible of the laity, wherein everything is comprised, which is treated at greater length in Holy Scripture, and is necessary for a Christian man to know for his salvation."

Luther himself has described the contents of the Catechism as follows: "First, there are the Ten Commandments, which are a doctrine above all doctrines, from which God's will is known, namely, what God requires of us and what we

lack.” From the Ten Commandments we learn that we are miserable sinners, lost and condemned to all eternity because of our sins, both original and actual.

“Second, there is the Creed, or the Confession of Faith in God, our Lord Jesus Christ, etc., which is a history above all histories, or the highest history of all, in which the incomprehensible and wonderful works of the majestic God, from beginning to end, are related to us, how we and all creatures have been created by God, how we have been redeemed by the Son of God through His incarnation, suffering, death, and resurrection, and how we through the Holy Ghost are renewed, sanctified, become new creatures, and are all together gathered unto one people of God, obtain forgiveness of sins, and are saved eternally.” From the Creed we learn what God in His infinite mercy has done for us and our salvation.

“Third, there is the Lord’s Prayer,

which is a prayer above all prayers, the most perfect prayer, which our highest Master has taught us, in which all spiritual and bodily needs are comprised, and where we find the most powerful comfort in all trials, afflictions, and in our last hour." From the Lord's Prayer we learn the true worship of God by prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

"Fourth, there are the holy Sacraments, the highest rites, which God Himself has instituted and ordained, and in which He assures us of His grace." The holy Sacraments are indeed means of grace, through which the Holy Ghost offers, conveys, and seals to us the precious merits of Christ's suffering and death.

Luther continues: "For this reason we should love the Catechism and esteem it precious and teach it diligently to our young people; for in it is comprised the right, old, true, pure, divine doctrine of the ancient Christian Church; and whatever is opposed to that must be regarded

as an innovation, and false doctrine and error, no matter how long it may have been taught, or how good it may appear, or how highly it may be prized; whether it is old or new, we must beware of it."

The Catechism is, indeed, a most precious gift of the Reformation. Study its contents from beginning to end, and you will agree that it teaches you the true Bible doctrine, gives you real comfort, and guards your feet against the crafty wiles of Satan.

**Was ist das Sacrament des
Altars? Antwort.**

Es ist der ware leib vnd blut
vnseres Herrn Ihesu Christi/ vnter
dem brod vnd wein/ vns Christen
zu essen vnd zu trincken/ von Chri-
sto selbs eingesetzt.

**Wo stehet das geschrieben?
Antwort.**

So schreiben die heiligen E-
uangelisten/ Mattheus/ Marcus/
Lucas vnd Sanct Paulus.



Vnser HER
Ihesus Christus/
Inn der nacht da
er verraten ward / Nam er
das brod/ danckt vñ brachs/
Vnd gabs seinen Jüngern
vñ sprach/ Nemet hin/ Eset/
Das ist mein leib / der für
euch

6. The Excellency of the Catechism Acknowledged



HE excellency of the Catechism has been acknowledged by Christian people ever since its publication. The following are only a few of the many eulogies which have been bestowed on it:

Justus Jonas: "The Catechism is but a small booklet, which can be purchased for six pennies (today for a penny), but six thousand worlds cannot pay for it."

Pastor Mathesius: "If in his whole career Luther had produced and done no other good thing than to give his two Catechisms to homes, schools and pulpits, the entire world could never sufficiently thank or repay him for it."

Polycarp Leyser: "I can truthfully affirm that this very small book contains such a wealth of so many

and so great things that, if all faithful preachers of the Gospel during their entire lives would do nothing else in their sermons than explain rightly to the common people the hidden wisdom of God comprised in those few words, and set forth from the divine Scriptures, the solid ground upon which each word is built, they could never exhaust this immense abyss."

Leopold von Ranke: "The Catechism, which Luther published in 1529, and which he, though being an old Doctor, prayed continually, is as simple as it is deep, as comprehensible as it is unfathomable, as plain as it is sublime. Blessed is the man who nourishes his soul by it and adheres to it. He has the imperishable comfort in every moment; under the thin shell is the core of truth which satisfies the wisest of the wise."

Dr. Schmauk: "The Small Catechism is the real epitome of Lutheranism in the simplest, the most

practical, the most modern and living, and, at the same time, the most radical form. It steers clear of all obscure historical allusions; it contains no condemnatory articles; it is based on the shortest and the oldest of the ecumenical symbols; it is not a work for theologians, but for every Lutheran; and it is not nearly as large as the Augsburg Confession."

Dr. McGiffert: "In 1529 appeared his (Luther's) Large and Small Catechisms, the latter containing a most beautiful summary of Christian faith and duty, wholly devoid of polemics of every kind, and so simple and concise as to be easily understood and memorized by every child. It has formed the basis of the religious education of German youth ever since. Though preceded by other catechisms from the pen of this and that colleague or disciple, it speedily displaced them all, not simply because of its authorship, but because of its superlative merit, and has alone maintained it-

self in general use. The versatility of the Reformer in adapting himself with such success to the needs of the young and immature is no less than extraordinary. Such a little book as this it is that reveals most clearly the genius of the man."

Bang, in his lecture, "Luther's Catechism, a Jewel of the Public Schools:" "The Catechism is precious also for the reason that Luther in the explanation strikes a personal, subjective, confessional note. When at home I read the text of the Second Article in silence, and then read Luther's explanation aloud, it seems to me as if a hymn rushing heavenward arises from the lapidary record of facts. The explanation witnesses and confesses subjectively. It is Christianity transformed into flesh and blood. It sounds like an oath of allegiance to the flag. In its ravishing tone we perceive the marching tread of the myriads of believers of nineteen centuries; we see them moving onward under the fluttering banner of

the cross in war, victory, and peace. And we, too, by a power which cannot be expressed in words, are drawn into the great, blessed experience of our ancestors and champions. Who would dare to lay his impious hands on this consecrated, inherited jewel, and rob the coming generations of it?!"

7. The Right Use of the Small Catechism



THE best way in which we may show our appreciation of Luther's Catechism, is by using it diligently and in the fear of God. It lends itself to a great variety of uses:

First, it is a book of instruction; clearly and impressively it teaches all the doctrines of Scripture that are necessary for salvation. It is the best brief book of doctrine that you can find the world over.

Second, it is a standard by which you may judge all doctrines, whether they are Scriptural or not. Whatever does not agree with the Catechism, does not agree with God's Word. This is not merely a claim, but the experience of thousands of Christians who have studied it.

Third, it is a rule of life, by which you may ascertain whether you are

living as a child of God or not. Do you live according to the Ten Commandments? Do you believe in the Triune God of whom the Creed testifies? Do you pray as your Savior teaches you to do in the Lord's Prayer? Do you daily remember your Baptismal covenant and walk in the newness of life? Do you confess your sins and believe that your pastor's absolution is that of God? Do you come to the Lord's Table in true faith, repenting of your sins and promising by His aid to amend your sinful life? What a wonderful rule for Christian believing and Christian living the Catechism is!

Fourth, it is a weapon against all false doctrines which Satan scatters about to ensnare people. The Catechism condemns evolutionism, modernism, materialism, unionism, and every other damnable "ism" of the devil.

Fifth, it is a confession—the finest, shortest confession you may find in Christendom. In the Lutheran Church the Catechism has

symbolical authority. What Luther teaches in his Catechism we cheerfully confess before the whole world as the divine truth. .

Sixth, it is a prayer book. Luther prayed the Catechism. Try, and you will soon learn how well you may use the Catechism for conversing in holy communion with your heavenly Father.

Seventh, it is a book of comfort. How rich in consolation is Luther's explanation of the Second Article! It comforts us wonderfully against the devil, sin, the law of God, and our conscience.

"Blessed are the hands that wrote this book!" said a Catholic priest, when he had read Luther's Catechism, which was published in Roman Catholic countries without Luther's name.

Blessed are we, if we study, believe, confess, pray, love, and follow Luther's Catechism!

8. How Shall We Show Our Appreciation?



THIS year millions of Christians will publicly thank God for the great gift of Luther's Small Catechism. We, too, shall join in this thanksgiving. However, our thanksgiving must be more than lip-service. How, then, shall we show our appreciation of this great and precious gift of the Reformation?

First, by thanking God, the Giver of all gifts, for this inestimable gift. Let our thanksgiving be sincere.

Second, by studying the Catechism with great zeal and applying its holy truths to our lives.

Third, by cheerfully supporting true Christian schools, in which many children may be instructed in the truths of the Catechism. We need Christian schools today more than ever before.

Fourth, by supporting Christian missions for winning souls for Jesus through the preaching of the holy Gospel which Luther restored to the Christian Church four hundred years ago.

Fifth, by spreading the precious truths of the Catechism, wherever we have opportunity, through personal contact.

Sixth, by giving copies of the Catechism to our friends who are not yet members of the Church and showing them how wonderful it is to know Christ the Savior.

Seventh, by our sincere prayers in which we ask God to preserve unto us His pure Word, as it is set forth in the Catechism, to enlarge His Church which preaches His pure Word, and to gather in uncounted millions through His pure Word.

*God's Word and Luther's doctrine pure,
Shall now and evermore endure.*

Amen.

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